

A low, round, flat rock, deep black and faintly reflective, with writing he did not recognize etched into the surface.

It had been shattered when he had first found it. He had squatted down to examine it, reached to pick up the fragments, and at his touch it had reformed itself. That had all been very exciting at the moment, but three days and a few pig men and monster trees later, Wilson didn't care anymore. He only cared that he was chilled to the bone and the rock was warm. Some comfort at the end.

He sat down on the rock, stretched his arms over his head, rolled the kinks out of his neck, and finally took the piece of wood out of his pocket and turned it over. On one side of the plate of wood he had scrawled some musings with a piece of charcoal. Not perhaps the most productive use of his time, but he'd been in the habit of writing a daily journal for years and he had missed it. The charcoal had already begun to smudge off, but he could reconstruct the missing words from memory.

Twelfth day after arrival

The little mole-creatures that burrow in the soil here somehow live on rocks! A brief dissection has revealed extremely strong digestive acid and a tough stomach wall. It did not reveal how the creature is able to obtain nutrients from minerals.

Unfortunately, there's not much meat on moleworms and soon there won't be much meat on me either.

Alas, what a young fool he had been that week ago! Imagine, spending all that time on such a frivolous thing as researching moleworms when the world was so vast, cruel and devoid of human kindness.

Wilson turned the plate over. For this, he wanted something a bit more permanent than charcoal. He picked up his knife and began to dig letters into the surface of the wood.

Abandon hope, ye who have entered here. There is no way to survive this place. The food is scarce, the wildlife is violent and it rains so much that you'll catch your death if nothing catches you first.

The skeleton before you

Here Wilson hesitated, wondering how much time he ought to devote to eulogizing himself to a stranger that may never come, on a tablet that might rot away or be eaten by some other animal with a strange diet.

These were his last moments on Earth- hmm, well- his last moments alive, at least- and Wilson was going to spend them how he wanted to. And since no one else was around to do it, he was going to write himself a decent farewell speech.

was once a brilliant man and a gifted scientist. Had he lived, he would have enriched the world with his genius. But this wretched soul fell prey to a cruel, evil trick, as have you, if you are reading this.

Carving was hard work and his hand was beginning to cramp. Wilson sighed aloud. Did he really have to do commas? Yes, he did. He was going to do this up right, darn it.

Dear reader, you have my sympathies. I would say that we might meet in Hell- but you are already there!

A bit dramatic, but a dying man could be forgiven some excitement. Wilson neatly arranged the contents of his pockets in a little pile and set the note on top of it. He took off his shoes- no special reason, only they were wet and uncomfortable from stepping in puddles- and lay down on his back on top of the black stone. It was surprisingly comfortable for a rock.

This might take a while. He'd had plenty of water to drink from the rain and wasn't dehydrated in the least... it would take about a week for him to die from thirst. And even with his meager diet it would take longer than that to starve. However, he suspected that he would shortly contract pneumonia, or perhaps meet with that thing that lurked in the darkness. Or maybe the hounds would come back. Or something entirely new would show up. Dying of thirst was the least likely scenario, in other words.

One hand rested on his chest, in the little hollow on the left where a full complement of ribs had once been. He had been expected to die six years ago- he hadn't died then. Wouldn't see his thirtieth birthday, his family had whispered. And yet, he had managed to turn thirty just a few weeks ago! He'd had a little cupcake up in his lab with a candle on it and he'd fed some crumbs to his rats. Ah, real food... but anyway. Not that one could precisely take credit for responding to medical treatment, but it did seem a shame that he had borne all of that (and really been very lucky!) only to die here.

What was there to be done about it? He was a scientist, not Robinson Crusoe. There would be no rescue, not here. It was only a matter of time. Wilson drew the line at actively killing himself, but he saw no need to waste his energy in a lost cause either.

He closed his eyes.

A bird was singing. Wilson stirred and rubbed his eyes. The sun had come out and was shining with full force on his outstretched body. The powerful rays had baked the lingering clammy dampness out of his hair and clothing. Another bird sang. Judging by the angle of the sun it was morning. He'd slept right through the hours of the night monster.

His stomach tightened and made a wet yowling noise. Wilson briefly considered eating shoe-leather and decided against it. The

experience was unlikely to be worth the inconvenience of going barefoot, for one thing.

He sat up, yawning. Maybe some of the berry bushes had grown fresh crops, or perhaps there was something in one of his basket traps.

Wait a minute, hadn't he decided to die just a few hours ago?

Wilson sat on the edge of the weird black stone and thought things over for a minute. Yesterday, in the rain, it had seemed so reasonable to lie down and die. But now the sun was shining, and he was hungry.

He thought all of this over very thoroughly. There was no point in living just to eat and keep himself alive- so he could get hungry again and find more food and eventually be killed anyway. It was uncomfortable to be hungry. He wanted to eat...

"Survival instincts," Wilson said aloud to nobody, and was answered by his complaining stomach. There didn't seem to be any good meat on the pig heads that surrounded this stone but perhaps the skins would be edible. Or perhaps not.

Wilson licked the tips of his fingers (mm, salt) and began to rearrange his hair, a habit of his upon waking up that he carried on even though no one here could see his hair.

He had a sense that someone was laughing at him. Maxwell, perhaps. Well, right there was a reason for living if he chose to take it: to spite Maxwell.

He looked up at the singing bird. It was a redbird. Surprisingly normal, and really rather pretty. It seemed to look right at him and it chirped again.

Maybe he was thinking about this the wrong way. It was useless to hope for rescue or to expect to stumble across civilization on the island, that much was true. But he had brought himself here, after a fashion, and maybe he could bring himself back if he held out long enough!

Besides, if he already wanted to go look for food, he wasn't as ready to die as he'd thought.

Wilson stood up and brushed himself off. He gathered up his things and put his shoes back on. He was not sure at first what to do with his suicide note. It didn't seem as if it would be very useful without a skeleton next to it. It might be rather useful as fuel for a campfire. If he didn't desire to catch pneumonia he would have to do better at staying warm and dry.

He took the piece of wood and tucked it into his pockets. And if he didn't want to get discouraged and develop more ideas about dying, he ought to do something to keep his spirits up. He wandered away humming a snatch of a tune.

In three weeks he would find out that dying on top of a touch stone wouldn't have accomplished anything anyway.